

Everyman
H A
L E T T E R *4.*
T O T H E

Rt. Hon^{ble}. the LORD-MAYOR,

O N T H E

SACRAMENTAL QUALIFICATION.

W I T H S O M E

OBSERVATIONS ON THE SERMON

(by Mr Coetlogew)

PREACHED BEFORE HIS LORDSHIP

On the 10th of JANUARY, 1790.

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M.DCC.XC.



A
LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

THE following address, written at the period to which it alludes, has lain unperused by its author from that moment to the present day. Different motives (not the least of which is a consciousness of his inability to treat the subject in a masterly manner) induced him to doubt, whether it ought to be made public; but, as he understands the controversy is to make a part

of city politics, and to claim the notice of the court of common-council on an early day, he asserts his right, as a member of that body, who possess the invaluable privilege of electing one of the three estates of the realm, to offer to your Lordship, a professed candidate for the highest honour the city of London has to bestow, his sentiments on a question, which, being now revived in its full force, must make a part of that trust, which the representative is to receive from his constituents.

Permit me, then, my Lord, to dedicate to your Lordship a few thoughts on the application of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as a Test for the admission into civil offices. I have the satisfaction to understand your Lordship was educated, and passed the early part of your life, amongst the Protestant Dissenters: you are free, therefore, from those prejudices, which, in a man born and instructed in the principles of

of the hierarchy of the church of England, are not easily overcome; and to an education of this nature I may presume your Lordship has added some degree of reading on the controversy in question.

The theme of the present address I propose principally to take from the discourse preached before your Lordship previous to the administration of the sacrament to such members of the corporation, who chose to attend at St. Lawrence's on the first Sunday after Epiphany, from these words: "To the law, and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

What connexion there is, between this passage and the nature of a sacramental Test, I must confess I am much at a loss to find; and I was not a little surprised, well knowing the abilities of the preacher, at the construction of his arguments, and their want of conviction on my mind. We agree in our first principle. "To the Law and to the Testimony" I would also ap-

peal — To that inspired volume, which I regard as the sole guide of my actions here, and the best evidence for my happiness hereafter. But, let me regard with reverence a book, which has little, indeed, to do with the miserable parties and disputes of contentious men, and the poor distinctions of qualification for civil offices.

The preacher, after observing the design of the Lord's Supper was to institute a perpetual memorial of the death and sufferings of our Saviour, to cultivate the benevolent affections, to promote peace, love, and good-will, amongst men, in all which observations my sentiments went entirely with him, divided it into a secondary use, that of a sacred oath of allegiance to the church; and on this ideal oath of allegiance he formed the basis of his argument.

In this view of the subject, the ordinance must be considered as a parliamentary institution; for, the Law, and the Testimony, to which I have appealed, know of no such oaths: the highest authority hath said,

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“ Do this in remembrance of me.” What of allegiance to any church, any sect, or any party, do we find in the noble simplicity of this command? The Scripture appears to leave the mode of commemoration open to the judgement and decision of churches and societies of Christians in succeeding ages. If the worshipper thinks he more solemnly and devoutly remembers his divine Master by a posture of supplication, and that outward reverential form, which is used in the approach to earthly potentates, nothing appears to forbid the practice: if, on the contrary, he thinks that God,* being a Spirit, is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and that the posture of genuflexion conveys too much the idea of idolatrously worshipping the elements, which are the instruments of commemoration, what is there, in the Law or the Testimony, which should prohibit him from following the dictates of his conscience, and remembering the death of his Saviour, in a serious and solemn attendance around a table co-

vered with the memorials, which the Lord Jesus Christ himself commanded to be used?

In either case, where is the engagement to be found, in the original institution, to be true to the leader of any party? That any serious, conscientious minister of the Gospel can consider the sacrament in so trifling, so degrading, a light, is to me a matter of astonishment!

I will not enter at large into the argument of the capability of all good citizens for admission into public offices; that argument has been discussed and maintained by much abler pens than mine; but, I must contend, in contradiction to your Lordship's chaplain, that the exclusion is a species of persecution. Were it only offices of honour, and stations of dignity, that were kept out of the reach of the Dissenters, he might have some colour for his assertion; but, in the strict sense of the law, many an able and industrious subject is forbidden to act in situations, where his knowledge and ability would enable him
to

to procure an honourable maintenance; and what is this but persecution for that which another law has declared to be no crime? Indeed, did not the moderation of government under the Hanoverian family, and the tolerating disposition of the times, agree to dispense with the strict formalities of law, the case of the Dissenters would very justly merit the appellation of severe persecution.

I do not, however, enlarge so much on this argument, because Mr. De Coetlogon considered another, which I also deem more important, worthy of his peculiar notice and attention: The profanation of the ordinance. On this head he says, "that what
 " proves too much proves nothing; we
 " cannot argue against an institution" (I presume he means his political sacramental oath) "from the abuse of it." This, however, your Lordship must observe is assertion, not argument: What is it that proves nothing by proving too much? He instances the case of Judas, who sat down
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at the table with our Lord ; but I cannot see how the analogy applies : the apostate was a hypocrite, who voluntarily joined himself to the table of the Lord for sinister purposes, and was not commanded by any authority human or divine ; and I think, if the fact proves any thing, it proves the miserable depravity of the human mind, which can profane the most sacred ordinances, and should rather be a caution to legislators not to open temptations to a crime, which they perceive, from this infamous example, the mind of a wicked man will lead him to fall into.

Having considered the Lord's Supper in the simplicity and dignity of its original formation, " Do this in remembrance of me ! " I will now take it up from the articles of the Church of England, which forms the basis of the doctrines of its ministers.

Article 25th. Sacraments be not only badges, or tokens, of men's Christian profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses

nesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will towards us, by the which he does work invisibly in us; and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him: and, in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect, or operation; but they, that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as St. Paul saith.

Article 28th. The Supper of the Lord is not only the sign of the love that Christians ought to have amongst themselves one to another, but rather is a Sacrament of Redemption by Christ's Death; insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Article 29th. The wicked and such as be void of a holy faith, although they do visibly press with their teeth the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ, but rather

ther to their condemnation do eat and drink the Sign, or Sacrament, of so great a thing.

On this view of the Articles I may again ask, whether there is any thing like an oath of allegiance, or profession of adherence, to any temporal church? but I would more pointedly enquire, whether it is not the plain drift and meaning of them, that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper should, by the consciencious ministers of the church, be administered with reverence and caution? and, accordingly, the rubric directs the curate not to suffer open and notorious evil livers to be partakers of the Lord's Table. — What a prophanation must it then appear to every serious considerate mind, when the Lord's Supper is administered to every candidate for official emolument; administered openly, not only to adulterers, blasphemers, and profligates, of every description, but to those who actually deny the existence and being of a God; and yet, by the Articles of the Church of England, these

these Sacraments are to be the certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace, and God's good-will to them, or the purchase of their damnation.

This relation is an open and acknowledged fact, known to every person who is witness to the qualification of men for civil offices; yet such a prostitution of the ordinance is, by a serious and devotional clergyman, pleaded for before an assembly of magistrates, and in a day when the light and knowledge of the Gospel is spread all over the land, as a security to the church and the maintenance of our happy constitution. Did our constitution stand on no better ground than this irreligious prophanation, I should, on the contrary, fear its speedy and utter destruction.

On the dissolution of the religious houses, consequent on the reformation from popery, it was but too often found the priest rose from the grossest sensuality, to perform the duties of his sacred office: in the present age, I fear, the laity attend the
solemn

solemn ordinance of the Lord's Supper with too much of the same disposition, when it is partaken of, not to commemorate the death of their Redeemer, but to obtain a passport quietly into an office of honour or emolument.

I have, in the course of public business and party contest, been acquainted with instances of persons, members of the establishment, who, having neglected in time to qualify, for fear of any ground of objection at the day of election, have had the ordinance privately administered, by a commendatory letter, in the same casual manner, that an address to frank the postage of a letter, or any other such trifling favour would have been procured. — Yet this is the security that the sacramental oath procures to the church !

Will it keep out one unprincipled member of civil society, who scorns the obligation of oaths, and who considers all religious ceremonies as matters of no importance? Will it keep out of office one designing

signing man, who thinks the hierarchy of the church an usurpation on the rights of men, and who would join heart and hand in pulling down this fabric of political importance?

It has been said, what have the Dissenters to do with the discipline of a church of which they are not members? A serious thinking man must be hurt at being a witness to the legal prophanation of a Christian ordinance in the country where he resides; the natural consequence of which is, on the one hand, indifference among those members of the establishment who think slightly of all religious ceremonies, and, on the other, infidelity amongst those who reason more closely on the absurdity of applying a divine institution to the purposes of party distinction: a judicious hearer must be shocked at being informed from the pulpit, that the Lord's Supper is an oath of allegiance; and observing it administered indiscriminately to every communicant who is impious and hardy enough to receive

receive it, contrary to the rubric and solemn articles of the church, and, what is of infinitely more importance, contrary to the law and testimony which alone is infallible, and which says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat."

Nor is this view of the ordinance entirely confined to the members of the establishment: the communicants of many other Christian societies, led by the prevalent doctrine which is supported by the national ministers, are brought to entertain vague and unscriptural notions on this point; they are induced to believe it is no other than a party distinction, and either neglect it entirely, or wholly mistake its nature and design.

I have now, my Lord, gone over, as nearly as I can recollect, Mr. De Coetlogon's last and most serious objection to any alteration in the law, which compels every candidate for municipal magistracy to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and I cannot perceive, either from Scripture,

ture, or even from the articles of his own church, that the manifest prophanation of this rite either proves too much, or proves nothing: it does, indeed, prove a serious evil, and, in a religious view, a great national disgrace.

If he still continues to think it is the abuse of the law, not the law itself, which is to be lamented, I would answer, that nothing appears to me plainer than that the law itself is the abuse of the divine institution; and for the proof of this position I would remark, that the Lower House of Convocation, in 1704, very staunch friends to the church, were of a different opinion from the modern clergy; instead of rejoicing in a statute, which compels them to act contrary to the canons and articles of the church, in their address to the Upper House, they represent “ the encreasing
“ difficulties of the parochial clergy about
“ administering the holy Sacrament indif-
“ ferently to all persons who demand it, in
“ order to qualify themselves for office,

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“ because

" because they do not see how they could,
 " in several cases, act conformably to the
 " rubric and canons of the church, in re-
 " pelling such persons as were unworthy,
 " and particularly notorious schismatics;
 " without exposing themselves to vexatious
 " suits at law."

Such a construction put on the act by a
 body of clergy, fully competent to decide on
 the question, will certainly strengthen my
 arguments; and it appears, that they did
 not consider the law effectually excluded no-
 torious schismatics, which is the present ar-
 gument for its continuance; and, in truth,
 nothing can be more apparent than that
 such an obligation will not bind a man,
 who thinks slightly of all religious ceremo-
 nies, and who deems all such forms the off-
 spring of priestcraft and popular delusion.
 It has been said, that this ordinance rests
 on the same basis as the oath of allegiance
 to the state! Surely the cases differ most
 materially; the latter is a mere civil action,
 justified by the necessity of civil govern-
 ment,

ment, as the will and institution of God, and the practice immemorial of all civilized nations. The tender of the oath of abjuration is no more a prostitution of sacred things than the tender of an oath in a court of justice; the perjury, or forfeiture of the engagement, is punishable in the civil court: but who will take cognizance of the breach of allegiance to the church, if the communicant, rising before her altar, shall immediately join the communion of (what the convocation called) the most notorious schismatic, and take the most violent measures to destroy that hierarchy, to which the minister of the establishment pretends he has vowed the most sacred obedience? I cannot, indeed, see the end which is obtained by the obligation to conform to the House of Convocation, fourscore years since perceived that it would not keep the Dissenter, or, as they termed it, the schismatic, from their altar, whilst it compelled the clergy to prophane the ordinance; and it must be readily acknowledged,

ledged, that the number of Dissenters, who have entered into office, either from indifference to the terms of conformity, or the protection they were confident they should receive from government, is not less at the present time than when the Convocation published their remonstrance. Many Dissenters, of the best moral characters, communicate with the establishment from motives of cordiality and esteem; many members of the establishment, who totally disapprove of the doctrine and articles, continue to partake of its Communion: in short, sacramental qualification seems a barrier to the church so light and insignificant, that it scarcely deserves a tithe of the zeal and animosity which is used to defend it.

I have read, my Lord, but few of the late publications on this question: of those which I have seen, most have drawn the principal source of their arguments from the rights of the Dissenters as men and citizens. In the present address I have touch-
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ed but slightly on these arguments, not because I had any doubt of their want of foundation, but because the objection to the Sacramental Qualification, from the prophanation of the ordinance, infinitely outweighs all others, and, in my opinion, deserves the most serious consideration. In this view I am surprised the attention of the calvinistic (or, as they are termed, methodist) clergy has never been directed to the controversy. Of that description of clergy, I presume your Lordship entertains a favorable opinion, by your departure from the usual routine in the appointment of your chaplain,

If, amongst the calvinistic clergy, there are men, whose bigotry gains the ascendance over their good sense and piety; if there are men, who, on serious consideration, prefer an imaginary bulwark of the national church to a solemn administration of the Lord's Supper according to the articles they have subscribed, and to the plain and apparent meaning of their divine Mas-

ter's institution; if there are churchmen, who think that every method by which a conscientious Dissenter may be prevented joining their society is justifiable, who would render the institution of their Saviour the occasion of strife and discord; to the Law and the Testimony I must leave them, and, if they speak not according to that word, let that condemn them.

I would, however, beg leave to add, though I have not entered largely into the question of the civil rights of the Dissenters, I am not insensible to that display of brilliant eloquence, which, I presume, was hinted at by your Lordship's chaplain, delivered by the right honourable gentleman, whose perspicuity of argument, justice of comprehension, and complete possession of his subject, is sufficient to distinguish him without the mention of his name.

As an elector for the city of London, I cannot omit making some observations on the conduct of a candidate with your Lordship for the representation, and to a declaration,

ration, which is likely to operate considerably to his prejudice.

The worthy alderman, having himself been educated amongst the Dissenters, may, perhaps, think it necessary, as a mark of sincerity to his new profession, to shew a more than abundant contempt and disregard of his former connexions.

It happens somewhat unfortunately for a new candidate, that the present representatives for the city of London, however divided by political opinion, have all of them declared themselves united in the cause of religious liberty, by voting, on the 8th of May, 1789, in favour of the Repeal of the Sacramental Test. Your Lordship has too much liberality to take this observation as personally applied; but the candidate, I have alluded to, I hear, from good authority, considers his opposition to the Dissenters will serve him materially with another description of electors; and, had his conduct been precisely that which he now states it, a serious objection to entering in-

to an engagement for any part of his conduct in parliament, many moderate and sensible men would have supported him in his principle; but he has expressed himself, not only on the occasion publicly referred to but on others, too decidedly to take the credit of a moderate, independent, man.

Much has been said on the impropriety of political as well as religious Tests, and I am not disposed to enter into the defence of the former any more than of the latter.

That the House of Commons is an elective branch of the legislature is an incontrovertible proposition; but, if electors are to be totally indifferent to the sentiments or principles of the candidates for the representation, that body might, with more advantage to the community, be hereditary or self-elective.

I cannot see the impropriety, when a gentleman presents himself to me to solicit a seat in parliament, with whose public sentiments I am perfectly unacquainted, of conversing with him on any subject which I
consider

consider of importance; and, should he reply to me, that he has not duly considered it and cannot give me a decided opinion upon it, or should he inform me, that, after mature deliberation, the argument does not appear in the same light to him as it does to me, in either of these cases I cannot be in the least offended with his conduct, and I shall consider whether, under those circumstances, from his general character, and confident of his ability, I may trust him with that discretion he solicits; but, if to a want of candour and politeness, he adds a failure in judgement, it is more than probable I shall not consider him as the most proper person for my representative in parliament.

An engagement to vote for any particular measure, in all circumstances and situations, will not be contended for by any prudent man; and more reliance is to be placed on the honour of a man of principle than on the engagement of a man devoid of it: — but, the more doubts I entertained

tained of the discretion of a man, the more pressing I should be for his opinion.

What prospect there is of immediate success in the application for the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, having taken no part in the conduct of the business, I cannot presume to judge; possibly the old clamour, which has been raised throughout the country, that the church is in danger, may, at this period, impede its progress. From the temper and disposition of the times, there cannot, however, be much doubt, that the cause, if persevered in, will be successful; I say, if persevered in, because the Dissenters, being admitted to the highest honours of the state, (that of becoming members of the legislature without the sacramental qualification,) cannot be very anxious for the permission to enjoy corporation dignities, which those who are desirous of them already appear in possession of by connivance: many of the political Dissenters are also apprehensive, that the demolition of this slight fence between
them

them and the establishment would ruin the Dissenters as a separate party.

That the church can be in danger, from the removal of that which is no defence, is an argument so ill-founded, that it can only be considered as a watch-word or a signal to mislead the populace. — The corporation of the church (for, a corporation it undoubtedly is, as well as those instituted for the purposes of trade or municipal regulation) has its rights and properties; and, while it is in possession of its present property and ample revenue, cannot be in danger from the accession of Dissenters. — It is more than probable Dissenters there will ever be; while the national church claims temporal authority over the consciences of men, there will not be wanting men with sufficient judgement to perceive that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, has nothing to do with the civil corporation of the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, or the Church of Rome, and is most truly defined, by the first of those, in
her

her nineteenth article, " a congregation of
" faithful men."

I ought now, my Lord, to take leave of your Lordship with some apology for the freedom of this public address; but, I am sensible, your Lordship has at times undertaken the same task; you have endeavoured to make the public sensible of their own dignity and their own interest, and are not unacquainted with the arduousness of the undertaking; there are many writers who would have taken up the pen with more propriety of diction or more close logical reasoning, but none with a more sacred regard to truth, or more earnest wishes for the prosperity of that city, in which your Lordship now presides; a metropolis, which, either sunk in the dissipation of the day, or hurried in the vortex of business, or led by the genius of party, is almost as ignorant on the subject of this address, as the meanest peasant or lowest artificer in the land.

With

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With every degree of personal respect to
your Lordship, I have the honour to re-
main

Your Lordship's

Most obedient and

Feb. 13, 1790.

Most humble Servant,

A LIVERYMAN.



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With every degree of interest
and I have the honor to

Yours faithfully



